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August 15, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: What to say about Berlin negotiations this afternoon

I spoke to the Secretary of State, and he says that he and others at the Department have firmly refused to discuss this question on the ground that we cannot discuss the substance of our negotiating position before the negotiations begin. He thinks this answer has been accepted by most of those present.

If you want to go just a little further, you could perhaps say something like this: We have three fundamental interests in Berlin: the freedom of the people of West Berlin, the clear maintenance of our own right to be there, and the right of access to and from the city for both the people of Berlin and ourselves. What makes the present danger is that Mr. Khrushchev is asserting a unilateral intent to "end our rights." We are in no sense inflexible about ways and means by which these fundamental interests are sustained, and we expect there will certainly be negotiations at the appropriate time.

McG. B.

Berlin